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CARDIN APPLAUDS PASSAGE OF BILL TO REDUCE DISPARITIES IN SENTENCING FOR EQUIVALENT DRUGS

Washington, DC – **U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD)**, a member of the Senate Judiciary Crime and Drugs Subcommittee, made the following comments after House passage of ***The Fair Sentencing Act of 2010***. Senator Cardin was an original cosponsor of this bill, **S.1789**.

“The American drug epidemic is a serious problem that we must address, but our drug laws must be smart, fair and rational. I applaud the House of Representatives for taking action today that moves us closer to eliminating the gross racial disparity inherent to our sentencing laws for crack cocaine,” said Senator Cardin.

The Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 passed by the House today and headed to the President for his signature will reduce the disparity from 100 to 1 to 18 to 1 by raising the minimum quantity of crack cocaine that triggers a five-year mandatory minimum from 5 grams to 28 grams, and from 50 grams to 280 grams to trigger a 10 year mandatory minimum. The bill also eliminates the mandatory minimum for simple possession of crack cocaine.

“Despite my ongoing commitment to completely eliminate this disparity, Congress has taken a long overdue step toward equality,” Senator Cardin added.

Under current law, possession of five grams of crack cocaine (roughly the weight of two sugar cubes) triggers a mandatory minimum five-year prison sentence, while trafficking 500 grams (approximately one pound) of powder cocaine triggers the same sentence. The dramatically higher penalties for crack have disproportionately affected the African American community. While only 25 percent of crack users are African American, they constituted 81 percent of those convicted for crack offenses in 2007. The current drug sentencing policy is also the single greatest cause of the record levels of incarceration in our country.

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